

Pilgrimage Through the Watchtower

Chapter 4: Seeds of Truth



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Chapter 4: Seeds of Truth

As mentioned earlier, during my seven-year involvement with Jehovah's Witnesses, I can't remember ever receiving a Christian witness at any of the hundreds of doors that I called on in my door-to-door work. I did, however, receive at least twelve "incidental" witnesses from Christians that I came in contact with in my every-day life.

The very first time I can remember coming in contact with evangelical (born-again) Christians was during my freshman year at Clarkson. By this time I was heavily involved with Eastern teachings, and had just been introduced to Transcendental Meditation. I saw a poster tacked up on a bulletin board on campus inviting all those interested in TM to attend an introductory meeting at Potsdam State University. My curiosity was aroused, and I attended the meeting with a friend from Clarkson.

The meeting was put on by two teachers of Transcendental Meditation. They carefully explained some of the history of TM and the "scientific" aspects of the technique, and invited all in attendance to consider paying the required sixty dollars and continuing on through the initiation ceremony. Many questions were asked, and by the end of the meeting, most of us in attendance were interested enough to take the next step.

Before the meeting concluded, two male college students who had up until this time been sitting quietly, began asking the teachers "religious" questions, such as whether TM was a religion, whether it conflicted with the teachings of Jesus, the Bible, etc. One of the students quoted the Bible, the first of the Ten Commandments: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me (Deut. 5:6,7)." The Christians then began asserting that Transcendental Meditation was in fact a religion, and that it was incompatible with the teachings of the Bible. Although I had by this time begun reading the Bible myself, I wrote these two Christians off as simply being too "human" to understand the more spiritual aspects of Eastern religion.

A year later, after having practiced TM for many months, I attended another, similar introductory TM meeting. Again there were several Christians present to challenge the TM instructor; one of them handed out printed sheets to each in

attendance. On the sheet was a listing of seventeen TM "mantras" (a mantra is a special word repeated over and over during meditation) and the actual meaning of each of the Sanskrit words. I was startled to see my own secret mantra on the sheet, together with an English translation of the Sanskrit "puja," the hymn of worship which is recited by the TM instructor at the initiation ceremony, in which the instructor repeatedly "bows down" in worship to a host of Hindu gods and teachers, including Mahareshi's own teacher, Guru Dev.

A couple of weeks after the first introductory TM meeting, I saw another flyer posted inviting anyone interested in TM to attend an IV (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship) meeting on the Potsdam State University campus. I knew nothing about IV, but I was interested in anything having to do with Transcendental Meditation, so I decided to attend the meeting.

When I arrived, I was surprised to find that the meeting was being held in a large lecture hall. There were perhaps two to three hundred students in attendance. An older gentleman presided over the meeting. At one point in his talk, in which he thoroughly condemned TM as being of the devil, he asked, "Will all those present who have given their lives to Jesus Christ please stand up!" All but a very few people stood up. While the speaker continued, lavishing praise upon all those who were on their feet, I sat there in my seat, terribly humiliated. Several others who were sitting eventually got up and walked out. I would have done the same, but I was just too embarrassed to get up in front of the crowd. The Christians eventually sat down and the lecture continued, though I couldn't concentrate for the rest of the meeting. I was thankful when the meeting finally ended, and I exited the hall quickly. I began practicing TM shortly thereafter.

I mentioned Don, the Christian on my dormitory hall at Clarkson, in the first chapter. In our discussions, Don had often expressed disapproval with my practicing TM, but never could seem to give me a solid reason for doing so. A year later, after I had begun studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses, he again disapproved, but likewise could furnish no good reason for this. He did invite me on several occasions to his "prayer meetings," which were being held in his dorm room each week, but I declined his invitations. I would often see several students going in and out of his room with guitars on these "prayer meeting" nights, and I felt uncomfortable with this. I just wanted to learn the Scriptures! I often questioned Don about Biblical things, but it was soon apparent to me that he was not at all equipped to do battle with Jehovah's Witnesses. On the other hand, once each week, like clockwork, Marshall came right to my dorm room and studied the Scriptures with me. I studied with Marshall each

week for three years, until my graduation from Clarkson in the spring of 1980.

After graduation, having moved to Colorado, I lived in a small apartment in Manitou Springs for several months. Then one day in July, a gentleman named Dwane in his mid-forties responded to an ad that I had placed in the paper for a dirt bike (motorcycle). He ended up purchasing the bike, and before he left he asked me, "How much do you pay for rent here?" I answered, "\$140 a month. Why?" He said, "My permanent home is in California. I have a house here in Manitou that my family and I use one month each summer for vacation. We're looking for someone to stay in the house year 'round to keep an eye on things. If you're interested, I think we could even beat the rent that you're paying now." Of course I was interested, and after a couple of weeks of working with Dwane, his wife June, and their two young daughters renovating the house's downstairs apartment, I moved in. I lived there for a little over three years.

Dwane and his family were Seventh-Day Adventists. Each summer they would fly out to their Colorado home and spend a full month relaxing there in the foothills of the beautiful Rocky Mountains. One of my favorite pastimes was dirt biking in the mountains, and Dwane (with the motorcycle that I'd sold him) and I would often take day-long rides together through the hundreds of miles of trails that encircle Pikes Peak. Especially on these rides, and sometimes at home, Dwane and I would talk about God. The awesome scenery about us often moved us to heartfelt expressions of thanksgiving to our Creator.

Dwane and I spent many, many hours discussing the Sabbath, which he asserted was still binding on Christians today. Neither of us made much headway on this topic. We also often discussed the "last days," which Dwane seemed to be more interested in than the average "Christian" that I met going from door to door. However, when stumped by a question, he would often startle me by asking his wife, "June, what do we believe about...?" How, I wondered, could he ask someone else what *he* believed?

Dwane believed in the Trinity. Once when I asked him to explain it, he responded, "Well, I picture the Trinity as a committee of three Persons that always agrees on everything." I don't remember ever getting into the Scriptures with Dwane on this topic. On another occasion, while driving down an old mountain road at night with our two dirt bikes in the back of his pickup truck, Dwane made an interesting comment. "We can be sure," he said, "that of all that God has that is of importance to us, Satan has his own counterfeit of it." I heartily agreed with him.

The overall result of our Bible discussions was summed up by Dwane one evening during the last year of my residence in Colorado: "We may not agree on a lot of things," he said, "but one thing's for sure; you've gotten our family back to the Bible."

After six months of buying, refurbishing, and selling used cars for a living, I got a production job at International Solar, a solar energy company, with the prospect of moving into a research and development position a few months down the road. There was a young fellow about my age in the production area named Ben. I eventually learned that he was a "born again" Christian, and thereafter engaged him in many theological debates. Our debates were often highly spirited, and heard by all of our fellow employees, as Ben and I worked in different departments and had to shout our arguments across the shop. I particularly enjoyed hammering Ben on the "kingdom," to which he would always respond, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17)." I never did understand what he meant by this.

After working at International Solar for six months, a Witness friend, who was studying to be a stock broker, offered to sell me his mobile automotive interior repair business. I accepted his offer, and soon thereafter became the self-employed owner/operator of Colorite Interiors. I traveled in a van to most of the major car dealers in Colorado Springs (and a few in Denver) once each week and did interior repairs on their used cars. I continued operating Colorite for two years, until I sold the business in 1983.

Another Christian witness that I received at this time came from my younger brother Brad. He had become a Christian during his freshman year at Cornell University. He came out to visit me in Colorado in January of 1981. Brad worked Colorite Interiors with me for a couple of days and we did some skiing.

Brad's and my Bible discussions at this time were disappointingly fruitless. Being a new Christian, Brad's Bible knowledge was very limited, and I, having been thoroughly trained for several years in refuting orthodox Christianity, easily shot down all of his arguments. But even so I found myself in a no-win situation. No matter how many Bible verses I fired at Brad, he still claimed that he "knew Jesus personally" and that he was "saved."

Brad, frustrated with the results of his witnessing efforts, returned home. He sent me a Christian music cassette tape and encouraged me to listen to it. I listened to part of the tape,

wrote it off as "emotionalism," and didn't give it a second thought. "We're praying for you," Brad wrote to me. "Isn't that nice," I thought to myself sarcastically. "Brad and his church praying for me. What a waste of time."

Dean and I received an interesting witness one evening at a Nautilus fitness center in Colorado Springs. We had just finished our workouts, and were in the shower, preparatory to our ritual "mellowing out" in the jacuzzi. I was minding my own business, taking my shower, when the naked young man across from me turned and asked me, "Are you saved?" Dean left quickly, not wanting to get involved, but I stayed to talk with this young man, intrigued that he would ask me, a stranger, such a question. "Well," I answered him, "I'd like to think that I'm saved; I'm one of Jehovah's Witnesses." "Oh," he said. "You're not saved." That remark irked me, and we entered into a lively discussion. I don't remember what all we discussed, but I do remember that the shower stall emptied quickly, and others who came in during our discussion also left quickly. Afterwards, in the jacuzzi, I remarked to Dean how amazed I was at the boldness of this "born again" guy. And he didn't even have "the Truth!" We both agreed that we, as Jehovah's Witnesses ought to be at least as bold as the "born agains."

Finally, I had a very interesting experience with Steve Johnson, a gentleman in his mid-thirties, who purchased a car from me. We were in my apartment writing out and signing the bill of sale, when he spotted my library of Watchtower books. "Are you a Jehovah's Witness?" he asked. I answered, "Yes." He continued, "How would you like to come up to my place some evening and have dinner with my family and me? I'd love to discuss the Bible with you." This was certainly a novel idea! "Sure." I said. "When would be a good time?" "How about this Thursday, around 5:30 or so?" "Great!" We finished the bill of sale, and Steve gave me directions to his house in Woodland Park, a short drive up Ute Pass from Manitou Springs.

Thursday evening I drove to Steve's home, tucked back in a canyon in the foothills of Pike's Peak. I met his wife and young daughter, and we had a delicious dinner. After dinner, Steve and I opened our Bibles and entered into a deep, earnest discussion of the Scriptures. At one point in our discussion, Steve asked me, "What do you see as the major theme of the Bible?" I replied, "God's kingdom." Steve's heart sank, and he said to me with glassy eyes, "Do you know what I see everywhere I turn in this book? I see Christ." I agreed with Steve that Jesus was talked about often in the Bible, but I wasn't about to succumb to his emotionalism. After three or four hours of discussion, I assured Steve that he had not

budged me from my understanding of the Scriptures, but that I appreciated his inviting me over to talk with him. He was certainly an uncommon sort of "Christian!" I left his house, happy that my faith had not been shaken by him. As for Steve, I labeled him as a "goat," set in his ways, and slated for destruction at Armageddon.

In the spring of 1985 I happened to come in contact with a friend of Steve's who filled me in on some things that had transpired since our meeting in Woodland Park. Though I had completely written Steve off and hadn't given him a second thought, Steve had come to his weekly Bible study a few days following our visit, extremely disturbed. "He's so lost in that thing," he told the group, "I just couldn't reach him." So that day, Steve's Bible study group began praying for my salvation. And this they continued, earnestly, for the next four years.

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